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# Writing To The Unknown: Blogging And The Presence Of Backpackers

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# SOCIAL VIRTUAL WORLDS

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## WRITING TO THE UNKNOWN: BLOGGING AND THE PRESENCE OF BACKPACKERS

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### Abstract

In this paper, we aim to study virtual presence in blogging communities. We argue that though some conceptualization of virtual presence has been made, this only took account of one's presence among a community of 'known' others. Increasingly, however, in blogging and other online communities, users do not necessarily know 'the others' but yet they interact with them and develop friendships and lasting relationships. The empirical data is taken from a specific blogging site, its members and audience. We find that the invisible and unknown audience has an important role to play in bloggers' presence online. In particular, the study highlights the role played by the audience in shaping the blogging experience and the sense of presence that this experience develops.

**Keywords:** *Blogs, Communities, Presence, Audience*

### 1 INTRODUCTION

"I cannot explain, a man must feel it, but once he has felt it he will divide his year into two equal halves, one half looking back on his latest trip, and the other planning and preparing for his next" H.E.Newton, 1912 (extracted from a backpacker's blog)

With the advancement of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), new social relations emerge and evolve (e.g. Castells, 2000; 2001; Giddens 1990). In this study, our aim is to explore presence within the online environments of a particular ICT, that of blogs. Most of the conceptualisations of presence in virtual environments tend to have applicability within a team or organizational context where individuals often have pre-existing relationships with each other, e.g. they are all members of the same project team (e.g. Panteli, 2004). We argue that in addition to such pre-existing and team-based arrangements where individuals present themselves in online environments and in the era of social networking, users do not necessarily know 'the others' but yet they interact with them and develop friendships and lasting relationships.

In this paper, therefore, we aim to explore presence within a setting where the participants are constantly on the move and therefore do not have a physical presence in a single place for very long. We refer to this group as the globally distributed individuals. For this, we have chosen to study the presence of backpackers through their use of blogs. Backpackers have traditionally been a group that has relied, due to distance, on non-face to face communication, e.g. letters and postcards, in order to stay in touch during their travels with family and friends back home. Blogging is perhaps the latest communication tool, as it is widely available, cheap and easy to use, that has become widespread among backpackers. It is for this that we aim to explore how backpackers use blogs in order to create and sustain their presence.

The study begins by reviewing the literature on presence, with particular attention to the notion of presence in virtual environments. Goffman's work on self-presentation (1959) is then adopted as it shows the significance of 'others' in one's presence. Following from these, and after a discussion on

the act of blogging, the study draws on the case of backpackers as our example of globally distributed individuals and examines how their presence is revealed through the communication medium of blogging. We find that there is a blurring of the known and unknown audiences in blogging communities which impacts on the bloggers' sense of presence.

## 2 PRESENCE IN VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

It has been argued that central to our understanding of virtual work is the notion of presence, which has been considered a vital characteristic of any virtual interaction (Lipnack and Stamp, 1997; Hinds and Kiesler, 2002; Gibson and Cohen, 2003; Panteli, 2004). Traditionally, presence has been related to physicality, synchronous availability and face-to-face communication and interaction. Psychologists (Latane, 1981; Zajonc, 1968) and management theorists (Fries 1967) have identified that presence is important as it indicates engaging behaviour, which is linked to the feeling of being attended and connected. Despite, however, these supportive accounts of the importance of presence in social interactions, our articulation of presence in the virtuality literature has been limited. We draw below upon different areas of work to support this argument.

Researchers in the field of computer-mediated communications have viewed presence in terms of social richness, namely, the extent to which a medium is perceived to be sociable, warm and intimate. Short et al (1976) developed the social presence theory where they defined media richness as "the capacity to transmit information about facial expression, direction of looking, posture, dress and non-verbal cues" (p.65). According to these media richness theories, face-to-face communication is considered as having high social presence whilst computer-mediated communication, such as email, has low social presence (Karahanna and Limayem, 2000). What is missing in this perspective, however, is the neglect of the active nature of individual agency, who, with the selective use of the communication medium, is willing and able to reveal, minimise or hide social cues in a mediated environment (Markus, 1994; Ngwenyama and Lee, 1997; Panteli, 2002).

In a different domain, researchers in the field of human-computer interaction have conceptualised presence in a virtual setting as an illusion that a mediated experience is not mediated (Steuer, 1992; Biocca and Delaney, 1995 and Lombard and Ditton, 1997), a definition that is otherwise known as virtual presence (Kim and Biocca, 1997) or telepresence (Steuer, 1992). This type of presence "...refers to the mediated perception of an environment. This environment can be either a temporally or spatially distant real environment (for instance, a distant space viewed through a video camera), or an animated but non-existent virtual world synthesized by a computer (for instance, the animated world created in a video game)" (Steuer 1992: 76). In either case, presence is seen as an illusion as opposed to 'real' presence in non-mediated settings. While this perspective illuminates the 'imaginary' nature of virtual presence, what it lacks is the consideration of social relations in virtual settings. Like in the 'real world', there is more than one social actor in a virtual setting; his or her presence is only meaningful in relations to others. Investigation therefore of the social aspect of presence seems necessary.

A more recent development emphasized the social nature of virtual presence. Panteli (2004), for instance, showed that one's presence in a virtual team situation may be independent from the physical or technical circumstances of the interaction; and is socially negotiated, reflecting, and in turn reinforcing, social connections between distributed members. The broader literature on virtual organizations echoes this social perspective on virtual presence. Orlikowski (2002), for instance, emphasized the ongoing negotiation of social relations in virtual organizations. According to Orlikowski, social connections over distance are achieved rather than given. Through recurrent, everyday practices, distributed members constantly negotiate and renegotiate their relations with others. Table 1 summarizes the main perspectives on presence in virtual settings.

Perspective	Focus of study	Definition of presence
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Social Richness Theory (Short et al,1976; Karahanna and Limayem, 2000)	The 'social richness' of technology	the extent to which social cues are conveyed via technology-mediated communications
Human-Computer Interactions (Steuer, 1992; Biocca and Delaney, 1995 and Lombard and Ditton, 1997)	Individuals' perception of an 'imaginary' setting mediated by technology	an illusion that a technology-mediated setting feels as the same or similar to one's immediate physical setting.
Social construction of presence (Panteli, 2004; Orlikowski, 2002)	Social relations among physically distant individuals	'social availability', namely, an individual's willingness to interact, indicated and negotiated via technology-mediated communications.

*Table 1. Summary of current perspectives on presence in virtual settings*

It follows that though there has been some advancement in the literature on our understanding of presence in virtual environments, the focus has remained at the team level. The aim of this paper is to deepen the understanding on the notion of presence in virtual settings with a specific focus on distributed individuals. These are the individuals who for a certain continuous period of time do not have a fixed, physical base and often rely on communication technologies for their interactions. Blogs is a widely available, easy and free to use tool, increasingly used by this group of individuals who are constantly on the move.

### **3 THE ACT OF BLOGGING**

Dearstyne (2005) finds that the definitions of blogs are unsettled, but nevertheless these generally agree that blogs are internet-based personal journals where individuals record their ideas in a chronological order. As Viega (2005, p.3) puts it "...the ability to append without erasing any of the previous content, makes blogs fundamentally different from other kinds of web sites... Regular readers can thus have a sense of identifying 'voice' behind the posts on the site".

Blogging is a new and growing phenomenon. According to blog-tracker Technorati the blogosphere has grown from 100,000 blogs in March 2003 to nearly 73 million in March 2007 and some 93.8 million blogs worldwide in June 2007. Despite this growth, most of the academic studies on this topic have been limited and so far aimed to understand its uses and potentials. Herring et al (2005) in a content-analysis study of 203 blogs describe blogs as hybrid in nature, as they allow for social interaction while giving authors control over the communication space as well as on what, how and how frequently they make a contribution. Accordingly, "in blogging the presence of the audience and the writer's consciousness of the audience clearly introduce the social into an individual's thought process" (Nardi et al, 2004, p.6).

Herring et al (2005) show that the vast majority of blogs report personal accounts where bloggers reveal their day to day experiences, thoughts and feelings. Nardi et al (2004) found that there are different reasons why authors blog and that these are related to the existence of the audience; these reasons: building chronicles of everyday events that serve to update others on bloggers' lives; expressing opinions to influence others; seeking others' opinions and feedback; thinking by writing. It follows from this, that the role of the audience is particularly powerful for bloggers. Blogs can become vehicles for self-expression and empowerment. According to this view, bloggers become more thoughtful, and articulate observers of the world around them (Blood, 2002). Blood also argues that blogs are socially interactive and community-like as they encourage conversational exchanges whilst Pluempavarn and Panteli (2008) find the development of social identity within blogging communities. Similarly, Silva et al (2006, 2009) posit that blogs, through their interactivity and informality, can support communities of practice and thus generate collective knowledge. We agree

with this view, that blogging communities support the development of communities of practice. According to Wenger (1998), such communities consist of groups of people who are bound by a shared set of interests and goals and who develop and share common language, approaches, systems, and tools for addressing those interests and goals. Therefore, Silva et al (2006, p.309) argue that “blogging is more than a mere technical phenomenon. It encompasses social and psychological aspects such as group norms and the personality of the blogger...In terms of the personality of the blogger, we found that an openness to share some aspects of his/her work and personal life are important, as are writing and communication skills”.

In the next section, and following from the discussion above, we present Goffman’s perspective that identifies the audience as playing an important role in one’s presentation.

#### **4 GOFFMAN, AUDIENCE AND SELF-PRESENTATION**

In Goffman’s (1959) classic work ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’, ‘actors’ engage in ‘performances’ in various ‘settings’ for particular ‘audiences’ in order to shape their ‘definition of the situation’. Performance is defined in this literature as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants” (Goffman, 1959: 26). As Goffman puts it: “when an individual appears before others his actions will influence the definition of the situation which they come to have” (p.17). At the same time, the audience, as ‘the others’, also contributes in the definition of the situation. Thus, actors and audience jointly construct the situation they are in as well as the situated identity of each other. According to Goffman (1959:20) “the others, however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual and by virtue of any lines of action they initiate to him”.

As this literature has shown, the motives for self-presentation are driven by the desire to be favourably viewed by others. This is not however necessarily indicative of a manipulative or deceptive behaviour. Rather, self-presentation appears as a sincere component of social behaviour and may be enacted consciously or unconsciously. For example, an individual who experiences a situation for the first time may consciously make a special effort to create a positive image of his/her self to the audience. Over time however and through experience, the authentic presentation of self is likely to come out in a social encounter to complement or even replace conscious attempts to create and control self-images.

Similarly to face-to-face environments, virtual, computer-mediated environments provide opportunities to individuals to project their own desired images. Clearly, the role of electronic communication medium is significant since in virtual settings it is during computer-mediated interactions that impressions are formed. As Gardner et al suggested (1996), “computer mediated communication users will be most concerned about their image when they are identified and interacting with an audience that they wish to favourably impress” (p.18). Thus, and in agreement with Goffman’s work, audience attributes have an effect on performances enacted by actors when in a virtual environment. We take this view forward in an attempt to understand online presence.

#### **5 RESEARCH SITE AND METHODS**

Backpackers have been the chosen participants for this study as they meet the definition of globally distributed individuals. A backpacker is defined as a traveller who spends one or more nights in backpacker/hostel accommodation while travelling (Tourism Australia/Niche Market Snapshot, 2005). According to the same report, between 1999 and 2004 the number of international backpackers has been increasing, from 407,000 in 1999 to 482,000 in 2004, and they spent on average 68.1 nights backpacking in Australia alone.

Special blog sites have been developed to enable backpackers to record their journals and share them along with photos with family and friends as well as with fellow travellers. The chosen research site is TravelBlog It defines itself as “a collection of tools so that travellers can write down a journal, send the address to family and friends, set up automatic mailing lists so that every time you add a new entry to your list your friends get an automatic email. Also the theme is travel, the tools are designed to cope with you moving around, maps and flags are linked from each journal.” As Travelblog puts it: *“We encourage our members to link to useful sites about areas, to help out future travellers.”*

Our research approach was one that captured the views of different players (frontstage, backstage and audience). This was done in two phases:

Phase 1 aimed to capture data from a blogging community used by backpackers. We had interviews with the director and administrator of the site (travelblog.org) in order to gain background information about its use and structure but also to get approval for our study. With the agreement of the director, we also set up a discussion forum where we invited backpackers themselves to share their views. The theme of the forum was: *“How does it feel to be ‘present’ online?”*. We received 20 entries to this forum by 12 individuals over a period of two weeks.

In Phase 2, we asked a group of first year students to go to the same site and write comments to bloggers’ entries. We then asked them to write a short reflection report on *“What it feels to be an audience to someone’s blog?”* The students acted as ‘unknown’ audience, as they wrote comments to strangers and they were themselves strangers to the bloggers that they were communicating with. This activity was designed for a group of 270 business studies students who attended a non-compulsory course in Spring 2009 on ‘Personal Computing’ that introduces students to various aspects of IT use. In total, 146 reflection reports of about 200 words each were collected.

Thematic analysis then took place and common themes were identified. Guided by the research aim to explore how backpackers use blogs in order to create and sustain their presence, data was coded and categorised according to different types of presence that were found in the study. Our analysis of the enacted unknown audience was based on two primary issues: reasons for the choice of blogs to visit and provide comments to, and secondly on how it felt to undertake this role.

## 6 RESULTS

This section presents the results of the two phases of the study and it is therefore structured accordingly.

### 6.1 Presence in Blogging Communities

Our data show that presence is conceptualised in different ways by global virtual individuals. Firstly, presence is seen in terms of ‘geographical location’. Backpackers use blogs as a way to inform their friends and family on where they are at different points in time. They use the site features to post pictures of the locations they visited and therefore make their experience more real and illustrative.

*“I find I tell people to check my blog to find out where I am (shame it's out of date at the moment), a lot of the users do the same. Why it's attractive - displays photos, looks good, a record of travels, interactive, comments from strangers (some unpleasant), free, archived, includes little maps that get filled in as new countries are visited, stats, basically it's the website that travellers would make for themselves.”* (Founder/Backpacker; Interview).

An implication of this, is that it allows those loved ones to ‘be present’ themselves in backpackers’ experiences and therefore helps in bringing them or keeping them close together despite the physical distance that keeps them apart:

*“possibly the nicest thing is getting messages while we were away and then coming back to have people tell us how much they enjoyed the blog because they felt that they were there with us.”* (Forum msg#11)

*“I just finished 6 months travelling abroad and I can’t believe the impact this website had on my travels. Not only did it keep me connected, but it let my friends and family experience it as if they were right there with me.”* (Forum msg#10)

Secondly, presence can be defined in terms of membership, participation in and commitment to a community. The site itself, Travelblog, and its members had a shared interest in backpacking. Overall, the site has more than 20,000 bloggers-members who can comment on each other’s blogs. However, the site also permits non-account holders to write a ‘public comment’ on travellers’ blogs. These may be people who are interested in travelling and therefore read others’ blogs even though they are not backpackers themselves. This unknown audience was found to have an influence on backpackers’ writing.

*“...knowing that strangers were accessing my blog has affected my writing style. I already knew it was public domain and thus originally wrote so that it would be of interest to the general public...”* (Forum, msg#8).

*“I never thought anyone but my family would read, but now that random people are reading (and sending comments), I try to tailor my entries to make them more fit for public consumption”* (Forum, Msg#3).

Further to this, there was a sense of commitment to the community, and the wish to make a contribution to the community:

*“it would please me greatly if some of the info in my blog has helped other travellers in some way to avoid the pitfalls I’ve had on the road”* (Forum, msg#6).

*“I started mostly writing entirely for family and friends, and was quite surprised when I found out people I didn’t know were reading and enjoying my blog. It might have changed my style slightly, I take care to explain things more, rather than assume what everyone knows I am talking about, but other than that my writing style is the same.”* (Forum, msg#7).

It follows therefore, that the invisible audience tends to influence how backpackers write their blogs. In some cases, the audience was known to the bloggers; they were their friends and family. In other cases however, the audience remained unknown. They included other travellers or simply others who were interested in travelling. We will explore the role of the unknown audience further in the next section.

Finally, a third interpretation of presence that can be found in the backpackers’ experience with blogs is presence of one’s self. Several backpackers commented in the forum that over time they felt that they were not just writing for others, but also and sometimes primarily for themselves:

*“...it helps me remember where I have been and what I have done”* (msg#2).

*“At first I started it for my friends and family, but I am pretty sure none of them read it since I don’t get any responses back or anything. But it’s Okay because now I write it for myself and to entertain those that happen to glance at it”* (Msg# 15).

To sum up, therefore, we can see from our findings that one’s blog may develop to a medium for showing presence to different groups of people as well as for one self.

## **6.2 Acting as the ‘unknown’ Audience**

Our enacted audience chose to comment on blogs that were written about their own countries and cities or places that they travelled to. For some, reading these blogs brought back memories; for others this simply was an opportunity to write comments about a place they knew very well and to

share their own knowledge with the bloggers. Other students chose blogs that were written about the countries and cultures that they plan to visit in the future. As table 2 shows, therefore, the three main reasons for choosing a blog were linked to an interest in the country visited by the bloggers.

Reasons	Number	Percentage
Own countries (live or used to live there)	44	30.14
Have an interest/plan to visit the countries	42	28.77
Have been to the countries/cities	30	20.55
Attractive pictures/titles (first impression)	27	18.49
Share common interests with bloggers ( other than travelling- music, sports, animals)	17	11.64
Other	22	15.07

*Table2. Reasons for choice of blogs*

Overall, our participants in this part of the study were found to enjoy their given role as ‘the unknown audience’. Table 3 shows the main reasons given. In several instances, students gave more than one reason.

Reasons	Number	Percentage
I Information Sharing/ Provide knowledge	34	23.29
Opportunities to share/express feelings, opinions, experience	30	20.55
Connect/Involve in someone experience feel closer to blogger’s world	22	15.07
See/Compare other experience from different perspectives	16	10.96
Recall memories	16	10.96
I Inspired to go travel or start blogging	16	10.96
Ability to ask questions	10	6.85
Other	15	10.27

*Table 3. Reasons for enjoying the role of the ‘unknown audience’*

Our analysis of the audience’s reflection reports, revealed that there was a sense of connection with others who have similar interests and experiences to them. As an audience-member put it: *“I like the way blogging makes me feel close to the bloggers’ world. Everyone ... can add their comments to the blog that can be seen by everyone ...Blogs help people connect easily and freely to each other... I think blogging is making the real world smaller and making our own world greater”* (YZ 13/2).

Another one put it: *“the ability to comment on someone else’s experiences and views made me feel somewhat part of them. It also made me feel reconnected to the places that they talked about. Even with the large distances between us I felt like I was making a positive connection and a worthwhile one”* (DV, 13/2).

In addition, opportunities for learning emerged. Participants felt that they were learning from others’ experiences, personal stories and opinions about the places they visited: *‘I got to see how they evaluated the country [that I plan to visit] from their own personal point of view and also how it matches to my concept of the region’* (HS 13/2).

*‘It is a great opportunity to be able to ask others questions about their experiences so you know the reality of places before you decide to experience them for yourself and can get an honest opinion* (LS, 13/2).

*“I will definitely use this [site] for future travels to see how people have had different experiences”* (RG16/2).

Further to the above, acting as the audience on someone’s blog, is not only informative but also inspiring. Reading about other’s experiences *‘makes you want to try something new’*.



## 7 DISCUSSION

In this paper, the aim is to understand how distributed individuals use blogs to build and sustain their presence within a virtual environment. The findings do not only confirm the social nature of presence as indicated in recent literature, but also enable us to expand our conceptualization of presence in virtual environments. We have found that blogging enables distributed individuals to build presence and a sense of connection with others; but this is only partly because of the technology involved. Rather the way the blogs are written and the language that is used to personalise views and stories have an important role to play.

The results of the study indicate that the majority of the backpackers started using blogs and writing almost entirely for family and friends. For them, blogging was a communication channel that enabled them to be in touch with their loved ones during their travels and to inform them on where they were and which places they had visited. Increasingly, however, being connected with strangers was found to be an important factor, even more important in some ways than the family members and friends back home. In particular, their connection with an unknown audience had influenced their writing style and further increased their enthusiasm in sharing their experiences with others. Our findings do not allow us to argue that a blogger writes to *either* a known or an unknown audience; indeed he or she may be writing to *both*.

Confirming earlier work on the variety of presence in virtual organizations (Panteli, 2004), this case further illustrated the negotiated, thus social, nature of presence. Though this earlier study has shown that virtual presence depends on the different types of environments that members are part of, mediated (e.g. virtual projects) and non-mediated environments (e.g. personal and social), the current study shows that the invisible and unknown audience also has a role to play in shaping one's presence online. For, this our study provides an extended view of presence in virtual environments.

In particular, the study highlights the role played by the audience in shaping the blogging experience and the sense of presence that this experience develops. The bloggers faced a multiple audience, composing both those they knew and those they did not. Firstly, for most backpackers, blogging was a way to keep in touch with their immediate social group. The primary aim was to present themselves to family and friends. As one comment on the discussion forum stated, *'[N]ot only did [blogging] keeps me connected (again), but it lets my friends and family experience it [my travelling] as if they were right there with me'*. In this sense, one's online presence via blogging was limited to his or her off-line social connections. Secondly, the use of blogs made it possible to reach a broader audience, i.e. the general public. The positive feeling of being a public figure, knowing strangers were accessing the blogs, getting comments from people they don't know, and providing useful information to other travellers, reflected the sense of detachment from one's immediate social circle to a much broader and general audience. This audience of blogs was therefore multiple, shifting between those known and unknown, though the distinction between the known and unknown audience may be blurred. As one's family and friends may not read or response to blogs, the general public may read, comment, and trace the blogs instead. Therefore, though invisible the unknown audience may develop a closer relationship with the backpacker than the known audience.

Ultimately, this invisible audience plays an important role in shaping the blogging community. The travellers tailored their writings in one way or another to accommodate the interest of their audience. For family and friends, this was reflected in providing rich information via texts, photos, videos, and so on; while for the general public, they noted the need to alter writing style, provide general information, or explanations in more detail. From the bloggers' perspective, the blog has developed from simply a communication means to a means for showing presence to different groups of people as well as for one self. It follows therefore that unlike previous research that has shown that in a virtual setting not only a different persona may be presented but also there might be different personas for different audiences (e.g. Turkle, 1995; Zigurs and Qureshi, 2000), what we

found in this study is that globally distributed individuals such as backpackers are enabled through their blogs to enrich their self rather than to change it.

From the audience's perspective, blogs provide not only opportunities for learning from other's experiences but also a sense of connection and the opportunity to share what they themselves know with the blogger-travellers. For this unknown audience, the community blog is a window to a wider world that develops to a community of practice. Unlike Silva et al (2006, 2009), we argue that these communities of practice extend to and incorporate the 'unknown' audience, as they are interested in sharing and enhancing their own knowledge through their participation in the community blogs. In the case of blogs and due to the blogging characteristics, the audience acts as a legitimate peripheral participant (Lave and Wenger, 1998) in the community and may themselves decide to join the community as a full member. Several of our enacted audience expressed an interest to start their own blog on Travelblog following the activity.

Our findings show support to Granovetter's (1973) theory on the "The strength of weak ties" which explains why interacting with "strangers" can more deeply benefit the network than interacting with familiar people. Ties in this sense are the links and relationships between individuals and are manifested in the frequency and type of communication they have (Pickering and King, 1995); their strength is defined as "a combination of the amount of time, emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding) and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie" (Granovetter, 1973, p1361). Based on these four dimensions, Granovetter differentiated between strong and weak ties. Frequent and emotionally intense communication is a characteristic of strong ties whereas weak ties are characterized by less frequent and less emotional intense communication in relationship though nevertheless important for work-related contexts (Granovetter, 1973, 1983). In our blogging study, weak ties (i.e. the link between bloggers and their unknown audience) have provided access to a greater range of knowledge due to the information given by the unknown audience to the bloggers and, ultimately have created a wider level of cohesion and identification within the community.

## **8 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this study, we explored virtual presence in blogging communities. We argue that though some conceptualization of virtual presence has been made, this only took account of one's presence among a community of 'known' others. Increasingly, however, in blogging and other online communities, users do not necessarily know 'the others' but yet they interact with them and develop friendships and lasting relationships. Our findings show that the invisible and unknown audience has an important role to play in bloggers' presence as well as sense of self online. The study contributes to better understanding of online communities and virtual social networks in general by showing how virtual worlds re-shape social space and social interactions.

A limitation of the study is that this was based on reflections and views shared with us by the bloggers, through interviews and a discussion forum and on an enacted audience through their reflections. Further research is therefore needed of a longitudinal nature where the researcher will observe bloggers' interactions with the 'unknown audience' over a period of time. Also, it would be particularly useful to examine how has the content of blogging changed over time, shifting from the known to the unknown audience.

Even though there is a widespread recognition that blogging has grown substantially over the last few years, as a communication tool it is still new. We therefore urge for more academic research on blogging; not just on the characteristics of blogging and its implications but also and maybe more importantly on the process of blogging and the effects that this may have on participants involved. Finally, due to its focus on travelling, the findings are relevant to those interested in tourism studies too, as blogs along with other computer-mediated communication media, like email, are cost efficient media among travellers. Unlike email, however, blogs are multi-mediated giving more opportunities for information and knowledge exchange that is useful when promoting tourism. For

managers and organizations, the study has implications in the areas of attracting and keeping audiences' interest but also in how to develop and support shared identity with globally distributed members.

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